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AUTHOR Reed, Naomi V.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A series of follow-up studies were conducted to examine the employment, education, and training activities of persons who had taken the General Educational Development (GED) Tests in the spring of 1980. The first two studies, conducted in the fall of 1981 and the spring of 1982, were nationwide surveys that analyzed the survey responses of 458 and 650 completed surveys respectively. The third study was a statewide survey that examined the employment and educational activities of 544 Maryland GED graduates as of the spring of 1984. Relatively large numbers of persons from all three samples either had participated or were participating in some type of educational program: 45 percent of those completing the first survey, nearly 50 percent of those polled in the second survey, and nearly 60 percent of those involved in the Maryland study. Significant numbers of respondents reported that passing the GED helped them either find jobs or obtain salary increases, enabled them to develop an enhanced sense of self-worth, and pleased their families. Many of the GED graduates have already recommended the program to others. These results suggest that, although millions of adults have been served through the GED testing program, millions more could benefit by successfully earning an equivalency credential. (MN)

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Two Years After the GED Tests: Employment, Education, and Training Activities of GED Examinees

Naomi V. Reed
Maryland State
of Education

Andrew G. Malizio
American Council on Education
GED Testing Service

John P. Fields
Maryland State Department
Department of Education

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Background

The General Educational Development (GED) testing program began in the early 1940's with the development of a battery of tests for United States military personnel who had not completed their high school studies. Today, through the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education, the tests are administered in all fifty states, in most Canadian provinces, and in the U.S. commonwealths and territories. The GED testing program has offered more than five million adults an opportunity to demonstrate that they have many of the skills they would have acquired had they been able to remain in high school.

During April and May of 1980, the GED Testing Service conducted a nationwide survey of GED candidates at approximately 250 testing centers. Approximately 12,500 candidates participated. Results are described in Who Takes the GED Tests?, Malizio and Whitney (1981). Two nationwide follow-up surveys of people taking the GED Tests during the spring of 1980 were conducted--one in the Fall of 1981, the other during the spring of 1982. A statewide follow-up study was conducted in Maryland during the spring of 1984. This paper summarizes the two nationwide surveys (i.e., Cervero & Peterson, 1982; Behal, 1983) and the Maryland State Department of Education GED follow-up study (MSDE, 1984).

In October 1981, Ron Cervero and Lyn Peterson conducted a joint research study with GEDTS to assess the impact passing the GED Tests has on adults' employment and training activities 18 months after taking the tests. Approximately 20% of those who had agreed to participate in a GED follow-up study were randomly sampled.

Four hundred fifty-eight completed surveys were returned. Approximately 350 former GED examinees had moved and left no forwarding address--for an adjusted response rate of nearly 30%.

According to Cervero and Peterson (1981), the candidates were very positive about their GED experience--95% reported that they would take the tests again if they were starting over. Approximately 71% of the respondents passed the GED Tests in April or May of 1980. An additional 15% passed during the 18 months prior to the follow-up survey.

Other highlights of the study include:

- A greater percentage of examinees was employed full-time for pay in October 1981 than was employed in April, 1980 (48% vs. 39%) (p. 4).
- About 35% of the persons working full-time for pay in October 1981 were either working part-time for pay, working (non-pay) or unemployed in April, 1980 (p. 4).
- Approximately 45% of the respondents who passed the GED Tests participated in some type of educational program. Thirty-five percent of all enrollments were at community or junior colleges, 33% of the enrollments were at trade or technical schools (p. 4).
- Educational plans are even greater than current participation. More than 75% plan to attend some sort of educational program--most planning to attend community or junior colleges (p. 5).
- Selected examinee (unedited) comment: "I was 50 years old when I got my diploma. I waited 22 years to get it and boy was I proud to get it. I felt 10 ft. tall when I walked across that platform to receive my diploma. It means all the world to me just to know I have it. I have five children ages 32 to 21 ant they all proud of mother for going back to school and get it. One of my children went back and got hers." (p. 7)
- Cervero and Peterson concluded that adult education directors and program administrators "who apply for adult education funding at the local, state, and national levels should find the information presented in this report useful in describing what happens to GED examinees after they earn their high school equivalency credential. **Local studies similar to this one should be conducted, and the information used to construct the most effective program possible.**" (Emphasis added)

During the spring of 1982, Elizabeth Behal and GEDTS conducted the second nationwide follow-up study of GED examinees to determine which GED examinees enrolled in postsecondary educational programs, the types of programs selected, and whether differences existed between GED examinees who enrolled and those who did not. About 20% of those who had agreed to participate in a GED follow-up study were randomly sampled.

Approximately 650 completed surveys were returned. About 400 were nondeliverable--for an adjusted response rate of about 45%. According to Behal (1982), nearly 50% of the respondents were students at some time between May of 1980 and March 1982.

Other highlights of the study include:

- About 30% of the postsecondary enrollments were at technical or trade schools; community college enrollments represented about 28% of the total number of enrollments (p.3).
- During the spring of 1982, 20% of the respondents were employed in white collar occupations, 41% in blue collar occupations, 15% in service occupations, while 24% were unemployed (p.4).
- Those persons who did not enroll in postsecondary programs tended to disagree with the statement "Everyone should go to college." and felt, in general, that it is difficult to be admitted to a college or university (p.7).
- Nearly 60% of those who had not yet passed the GED Tests participated in some type of postsecondary educational program--15% of these enrollments were at apprenticeship or on-the-job training programs (p. 9).
- More than 90% felt that testing centers should provide candidates information about educational opportunities after high school (p. 10).
- Behal concluded that "the GED graduate and the postsecondary community

would gain if each were more aware of the opportunities that the other could provide." (p.10)

During the spring of 1984, the Adult and Community Education Branch, Division of Instruction, and the GED Testing Office of the Maryland State Department of Education, and the GED Testing Service conducted the first statewide GED follow-up study. Approximately 10% of the 1981 and 1982 Maryland GED graduates were randomly selected and mailed a letter, instructions, survey, and business-reply envelope.

Five hundred forty-four graduates responded to the survey. Approximately 175 surveys were returned as nondeliverable--for an adjusted response rate of 45%. Highlights of the (MSDE, 1984) survey include:

- Approximately 78% of the respondents were white, 20% were black. About 62% were born in Maryland.
- Most learned about the GED Tests through neighbors, relatives or friends.
- More than 50% reported taking the tests to meet a personal goal.
- About 25% presented the credential for employment or educational purposes within one week of receiving the it. About half of the graduates have not yet presented the diploma.
- More than 90% have already recommended taking the GED Tests to non-high school graduates.
- About 55% expected that taking the tests would help them get a job. About 39% reported that the tests helped them get a job (see Figure 1).
- About 75% expected that taking the tests would help them be admitted to a college or university.
- At the time of initial testing, 40% were employed full-time for pay. During the spring of 1984, about 54% were employed full-time for pay. The percentage of people unemployed but seeking work decreased from 23% in 19[illegible] to 18% in 1984 (see Figure 2). This may, however, reflect the

overall decline in unemployment over the same period of time in Maryland from an average of 8.5% in 1982 to 5.3% in July, 1984.

- Approximately 20% reported salary increases as a direct result of earning their GED diploma (see Figure 3).
- Nearly 60% have participated in some type of postsecondary education or training. About 35% enrolled at community colleges; another 11% have attended trade or technical schools (see Figure 4).
- About 80% plan to participate in educational activities.
- Seventy-three percent reported increased self-worth in their ability.
- Almost 90% reported that their families were pleased. In about half the cases, employers and fellow workers were told.
- If there had been no opportunity to earn a GED diploma, nearly 43% would not attempt to earn a high school credential. About 35% would have attended evening high school if GED opportunities were not available.
- Thirty-six percent felt most prepared to take the Reading Skills test, only seven percent felt least prepared to take the Reading Skills test. Thirty-five percent felt least prepared to take the Mathematics test.
- Over three-fourths of those responding spent time preparing to take the tests. Of those who prepared, about 20% spent fewer than 20 hours, another 20% spent more than 75 hours preparing for the tests. Figure 5 shows the percentages of graduates by type of program and number of hours of preparation.

Results of the two nationwide follow-up studies as well as the preliminary report on the Maryland follow-up study suggest:

1. Although millions of adults have been served through the GED testing program, millions more could benefit by successfully earning an

equivalency credential. Many of those who could benefit are probably unaware that ABE/GED programs exist.

2. Nationally, we now know considerably more about people who take the GED tests and the overall impact taking the tests has on individuals' lives. We need to know more about the people who are not participating in adult education.
3. More research[1] is needed, especially at state and regional levels, to provide useful information for those responsible for funding adult and continuing education programs.

References

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Saskatchewan Department of Continuing Education. (1982). Follow-Up survey of 1980 GED graduates. Saskatchewan, Canada.

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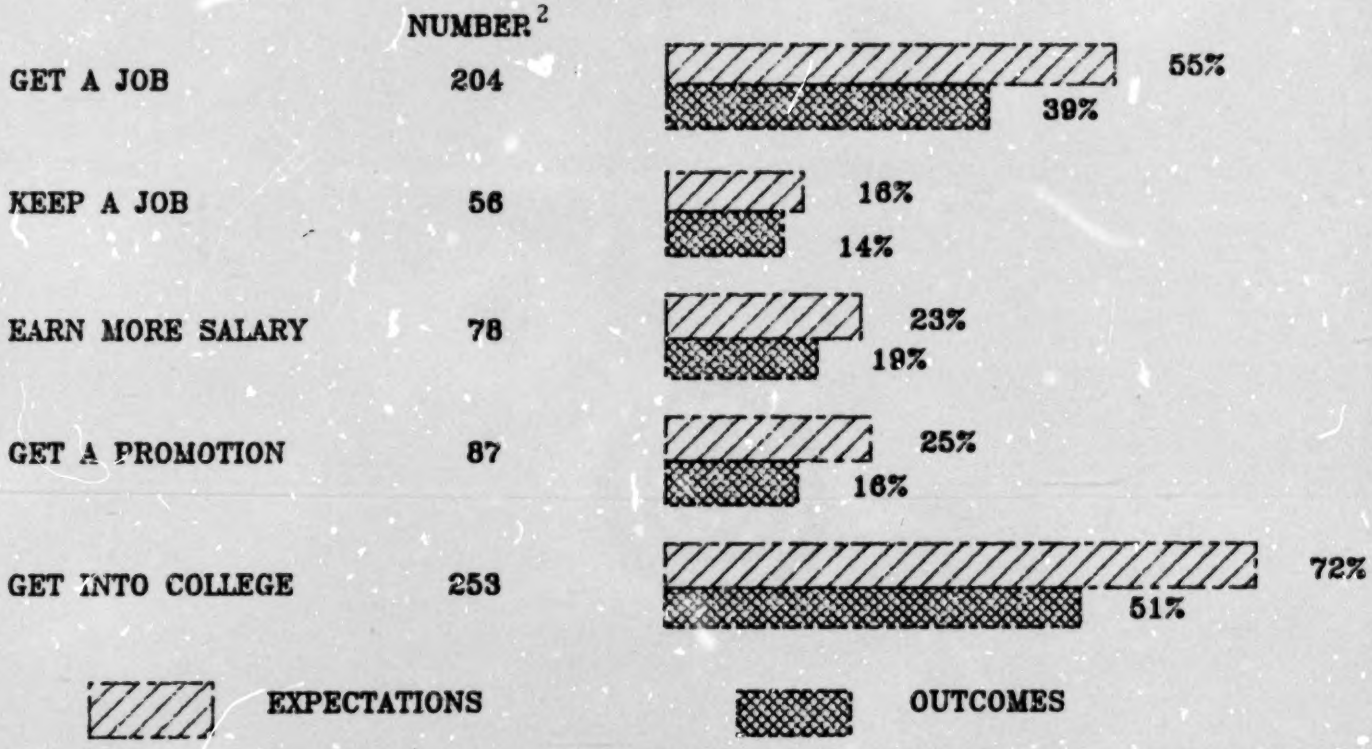
[1] Readers interested in conducting GED surveys in their state, province, or region should contact Drew Malizio or Doug Whitney, GED Testing Service, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036-1193.

FIGURE 1

EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND FURTHER EDUCATION

(RESPONSE RATE REPORTED IN PERCENTAGES)[1]



[1] Percentage of persons who answered "yes" to each response.

[2] Total number of either "yes" or "no" responses.

FIGURE 2

CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT STATUS

FOR

1981 AND 1982 MARYLAND GED GRADUATES

(RESPONSE RATE REPORTED IN PERCENTAGES)

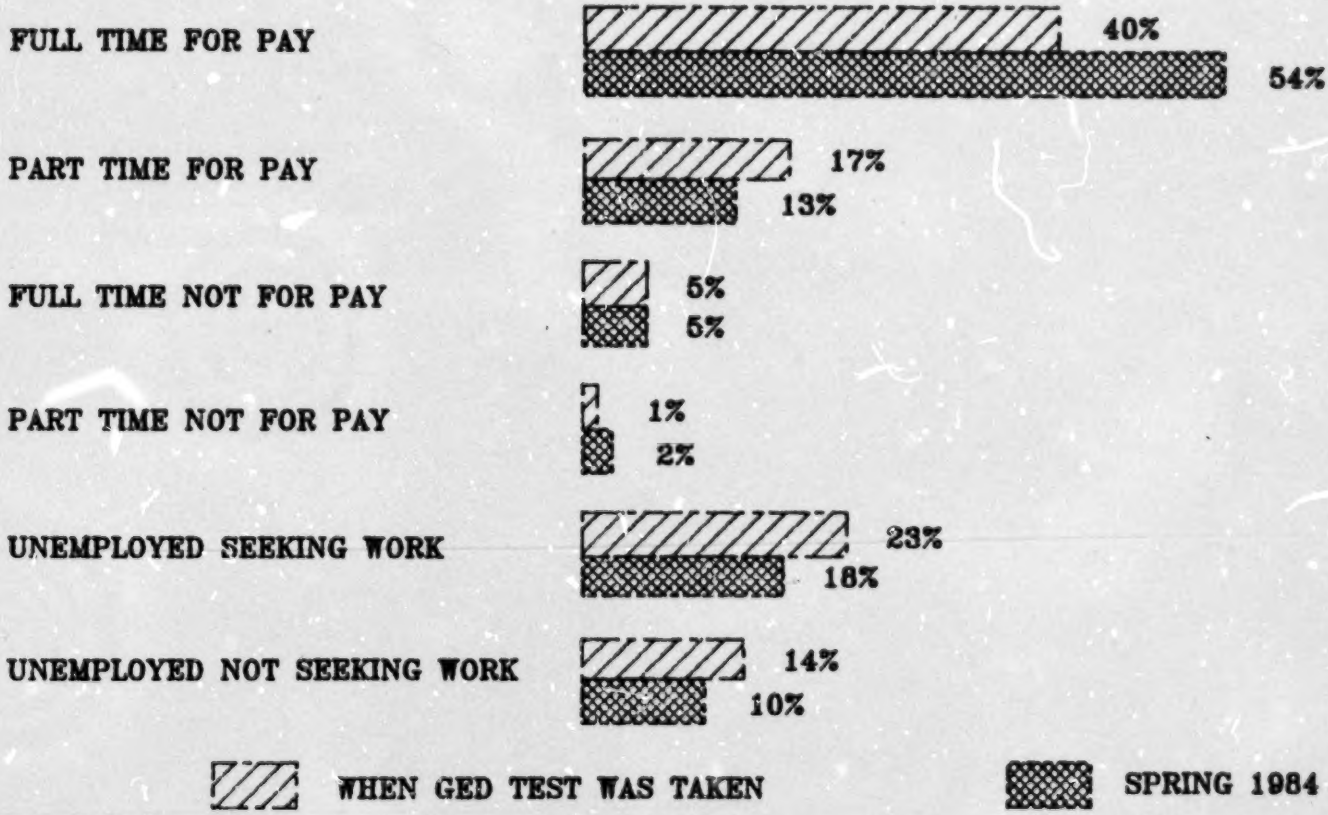


FIGURE 3

SALARY INCREASES ATTRIBUTED TO EARNING A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

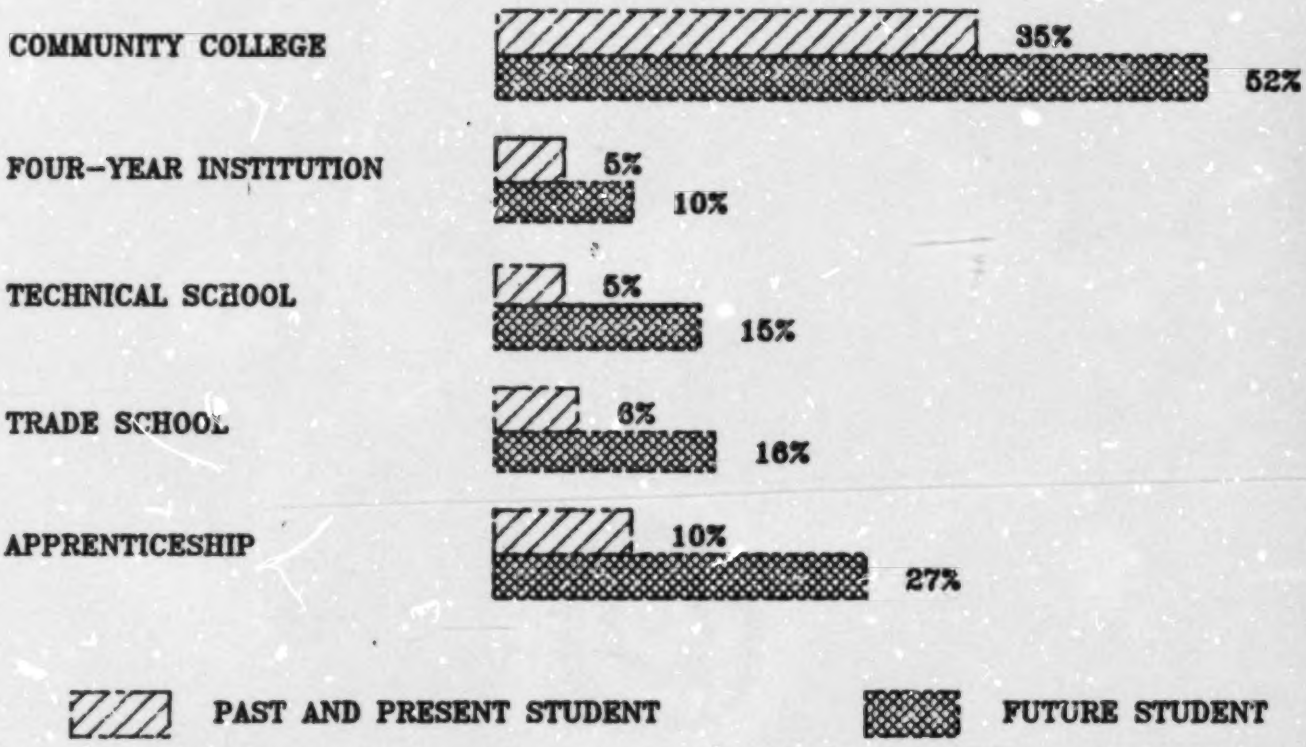
AMOUNT OF INCREASED INCOME	NUMBER OF PERSONS [1]	TOTAL FOR ONE YEAR
LESS THAN $2,000	44	$66,000
$2,000–$4,000	15	45,000
$4,000–$6,000	14	70,000
$6,000–$8,000	9	63,000
OVER $8,000	19	171,000
TOTAL	101	$415,000

[1] There were a total of 544 responses to the survey. There were 269 persons who reported getting an increase in income. Of that number, 101 persons attributed their increase directly to earning a high school diploma.

FIGURE 4

STUDENT STATUS
AND
CHOICE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

(RESPONSE RATE REPORTED IN PERCENTAGES)[1]



[1] Respondents could mark as many answers as applicable.

FIGURE 5

TIME SPENT IN INSTRUCTION

(RESPONE RATE REPORTED IN PERCENTAGES)

RESPONDING GROUPS	NUMBER OF HOURS					
	1-10	11-19	20-30	31-49	50-75	75+
ALL GED GRADUATES	13	8	14	13	13	19
PARTICIPANTS IN PROGRAM-SPONSORED INSTRUCTION	4	9	19	20	21	27
PARTICIPANTS IN MSDE FUNDED PROGRAMS	5	9	20	20	23	23
PARTICIPANTS IN NON-MSDE FUNDED PROGRAMS	1	9	16	20	17	33